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ABSTRACT

The American Association for Agricultural Education's distinguished lecture process provides agricultural educators with opportunities to discuss relevant professional problems. The 1980s lectures examined the organization's position in relationship to the environment. Programs developed human capital potential for the agricultural industry and incorporated salient research, developed skills, suggested technological needs, and maintained teaching professionalism. Four strengths of the program are as follows: surprise topics generate suspense and open listeners' minds; lecturers share their best thoughts; lecturers benefit as individuals; and selection of lecturers is rotated among the various regions. The program has the following weaknesses: the lecturer has no opportunity to lead discussions; speakers are not required to address current professional needs; manuscripts describe problems rather than suggest solutions; the selection and rotation system could eliminate a scholar from being selected; and the philosophy statement, objectives, and guidelines are not known to membership. Policies should ensure that scholars lead discussions on major contemporary issues. It is recommended that the series be continued, guidelines be reviewed, and changes be presented at the annual meeting. (11 references) (NLA)

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION

DISTINGUISHED LECTURE REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

December 8, 1991

A Synthesis of the Distinguished Lectures of the Decade of the 80's - Lessons for the Future -

The Distinguished Lecture Review Committee members were Dr. Douglas Bishop (Montana), Dr. Jasper Lee (Mississippi), and Dr. Gerald Fuller (Vermont) who served as the group facilitator.

The committee was asked to review the Distinguished Lecture series with an eye toward the future. It was our original intent to review the manuscripts for the decade of the 1980's and (1) identify messages that contained futuristic implications for the profession, (2) identify solutions proposed to address the problems, and (3) ascertain what outcomes occurred as a result of implementing the solutions. After completing our analysis of the manuscripts we decided to redefine our objectives to include an assessment of the Distinguished Lecture series process and to present the members of the profession with recommendations.

Our report contains a brief look at the history behind the Distinguished Lecture series and the current policies guiding the process. It includes a summary of our analysis of the consequences of the Lectures of the decade of the 1980's and a set of recommendations pertaining to the Distinguished Lecture process.

We approached this task with trepidation. First, we were asked to talk about an activity that is well received by the members of our profession and one that goes back to the foundation upon which our organization was founded. Second, there is the danger that we may miss some of the important messages contained in the manuscripts and overstate some of the less important items. However, this activity has been professionally invigorating and we suggest that you may wish to invest some of your time revisiting the Lectures.

A BRIEF TOUR THROUGH HISTORY

The vision of the founders of our professional organization was to create a structure that would bring experienced teacher educators in agriculture together annually to discuss problems.

A Ten Year Teacher Trainers in Agriculture group was first organized in 1929 at a meeting of the American Vocational Association (AVA) in New Orleans. In 1936, a policy statement was adopted and included the following:

> "The outstanding purpose of the organization shall be to afford an opportunity for the frank and open discussion of problems in the field of agricultural education among the more experienced members of the profession."

Presented at the General Session of the Association for Agricultural Educators, December 8, 1991, in Los Angeles, California.

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"An annual breakfast meeting shall be scheduled at the time and place designated for the American Vocational Association Convention."

"The program shall consist of a discussion of an important problem in agricultural education, the discussion leader and topic not to be announced beforehand."

"The Secretary shall provide each member with a resume' of the discussion within the six months immediately following the meeting" (Horne).

At a meeting in Miami in 1950, the organization changed its name to Teacher Trainers in Agricultural Education, and became a Section of the Agricultural Education Division of AVA. The purposes and operating guidelines associated with the "mystery speaker" series were not substantively altered.

Today, the American Association for Agricultural Educators operates as an affiliate of the Agricultural Education Division of the AVA. The "discussion leader/mystery speaker" has become the Distinguished Lecturer. The President elect selects the lecturer and the lecturer decides on the topic. The name of the lecturer and topic are kept a mystery until the lecture is presented at the annual breakfast during the annual AVA Convention, and the manuscript is published in the Spring issue of the AAAE Journal.

Conclusion: The history of our organization leads us to believe the Distinguished Lecture process should provide experienced agricultural educators with opportunities to discuss important futuristic problems facing the profession.

SUMMARY OF REVIEW OF DISTINGUISHED LECTURES OF THE 1980'S

A common thread running through the fabric of the lectures of the 1980's was that we must continually examine our position in relationship to our environment. If this is the main theme of the lecture series then we have a good thing going.

Overall, the lectures tend to convey the message that the future hinges on quality programs to develop human capital potential for the agricultural industry. This involves, according to the manuscripts, giving attention to carrying out salient research, using teaching procedures that develop higher order skills, relating professionally to various publics, addressing technology needs, and attracting and preparing quality personnel for entry into the profession. Teacher educators and the AAAE were challenged to become more proactive, and to debate the issues faced by the profession.

The tendency was to focus unquestioningly upon what the members of the profession consider to be normal and customary strengths of teacher education and in-school programs. The futuristic messages contained in the manuscripts tend to admonish teacher educators to hold fast to traditions. Members of the profession were repeatedly challenged to act but a dearth of explicit recommendations were presented.

Conclusion: The affect that a decade of lectures by distinguished members of our profession has had is open to debate. It was difficult to identify substantive, long-term changes that have occurred as a result of the recommendations contained in the manuscripts.

REVIEW OF DISTINGUISHED LECTURE PROCESS

The Distinguished Lecture is very well received by the members of the profession and should not be eliminated. However, the process has both strengths and weaknesses. We realize that when one identifies weaknesses in an established institution it is perceived to be an attack. We wish to make it clear that our suggestions for changes are in no way speaking out against the Lecture series. As a committee, we believe it is our responsibility to recommend changes we feel should be implemented to improve the Distinguished Lecture series. We also believe that these recommendations must be discussed openly and frankly by the members of the profession before final actions are taken.

General comments:

1. There is no visible, planned tie between any of the lectures. The subject and content are based upon the lecturers interests and immediate concerns, and are a surprise to the members present at the breakfast meeting; and

2. The lecturer considers it an honor to be selected and hopes to challenge the members of the profession.

Strengths:

1. The mystery created in the existing process generates a feeling of suspense and excitement that everyone looks forward to at the annual breakfast. Surprise topics can open a listeners mind to new and different approaches. This is particularly true when a lecturer is from a different region than the listener;

2. Lecturers have an opportunity to share their best thoughts on an affair of the profession which they select, and in the past have done so eloquently;

3. The lecturer benefits as an individual. This is particularly true if a person is in mid-career and needs to maintain a viable presence in the profession, or is nearing retirement and needs an opportunity to share a bit of wisdom gained over the years; and

4. The present process helps to assure the honor of selecting and presenting the distinguished lecture will be rotated among the various regions.

Weaknesses:

1. There is no opportunity for the lecturer or others to lead a discussion of the topic of the lecture. The manuscript is not reviewed or critiqued in advance of presentation and publication;

2. Speakers are not required to speak to burning issues or current needs of the profession. There is no guarantee that the lecturer will address a contemporary issue that the members of the profession consider to be a high priority for discussion;

3. Manuscripts usually deal extensively with describing a problem or concern and much less time is given to suggesting solutions or approaches;

4. The present selection and rotation system could eliminate a knowledgeable scholar from ever being selected; and

5. The philosophy statement, objectives, and guidelines used to select lecturers are not well known to the membership at-large.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for policies and procedures that assures that top scholars have an opportunity to lead open and frank discussions on major contemporary issues that face the profession. The Distinguished Lecture series can meet these needs, but it is apparent that the existing Lecture process does not guarantee every aspect of these requirements.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. The Distinguished Lecture series be continued;

2. The existing guidelines and process be reviewed; and

3. Appropriate changes be recommended to the AAAE membership at the next annual meeting.

Some ideas that we believe are worthy of consideration during the review of the Distinguished Lecture series process are:

1. The annual AAAE breakfast meeting could be dedicated to the outstanding purpose of providing an opportunity for frank and open discussion of problems in the profession;

2. Business, awards, and recognitions customarily and normally carried-out at the breakfast meeting could occur at another time during the convention;

3. A Distinguished Lecturer selection committee could be appointed by the President to develop a list of topics meaningful to the future of the profession that need to be discussed, and to select the lecturer;

4. The manuscript could be reviewed by the committee in advance. The committee could appoint a reaction panel to facilitate discussion at the annual breakfast meeting, and the panel would receive copies of the manuscript in advance of the meeting;

5. When needed, standing or temporary committees could be appointed by the president to develop approaches to implementing meritorious ideas that are presented through the lecture series;

6. The philosophy, objectives, policies, and procedures guiding the implementation of the Distinguished Lecture series should be made public;

7. The Distinguished Lecturer should be recognized with a plaque or certificate, a letter sent by the Secretary to the Lecturer's Dean, and a news release to the Lecturer's home institution; and

8. The manuscript will be published in the AAAE Journal, and a resume' of the discussion should be prepared by the Secretary and published in the AAAE Newsletter.

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